NCSA Mosaic: DataLounge

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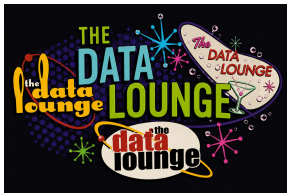

1995-2026

Here at the DataLounge, we served up a steaming pile of Gay Celebrity Gossip, Politics, News, and Pointless Bitchery for 31 long years. Back in the early days, when nobody knew what the web was for, we built this strange little community just because we could. Somehow, this place, where anonymous strangers could spend forty pages arguing about a princess's right to wear a particular tiara and forty more debating whether her husband was a total bottom, ended up becoming one of the internet's more authentic communities. This was one of those peculiar back alleys of the internet where the rest of the web was shared and eviscerated but we depended on a sprawling, diverse internet serving up new outrages and oddities to pick apart. In the end, the receding tide of the World Wide Web left the DataLounge disconnected from the wider ecosystem that once fed us, as well as from the posters who came here to rage at the absurdity of it all.

Over the decades many hopefuls appeared with a splash and an IPO only to descend into booze and dope. Mosaic, Netscape, Internet Explorer, Shockwave, Java, WebCrawler, Lycos, AltaVista, Excite, HotBot, Inktomi, GeoCities, AOL, PlanetOut, Gay.com, Yahoo! Groups, Kozmo, Friendster, LiveJournal, Gawker, Tumblr, Dlisted, MySpace, After Ellen, Television Without Pity, and IMDb message boards were but a few of the mayflies of the DataLounge era. We survived the browser wars, the dot-com boom and bust, the false promise and collapse of the banner ad, the smartphone revolution, and even the rise of social media and its inevitable enshittification.

When DataLounge started in 1995, AIDS was raging. Anti-retrovirals were just over the horizon. "God Hates Fags" wasn't a historical artifact; it was a sign assholes carried at funerals. Congress passed DOMA. Matthew Shepard was murdered. Then came 9/11. Then civil unions. Then marriage equality. Then social media. Then apps. Then whatever this shit is now.

Through it all, DataLounge was here.

Younger readers may not realize that there was a time when simply putting a gay organization online was an act of radicalism. Long before "digital strategy" became a profession, the same people behind DataLounge put organizations like GLAAD, Lambda Legal, APLA, GLSEN, the New York AIDS Coalition, OUT, POZ, Southern Voice, and dozens of others on the web — often for little or no money. We believed visibility was the real killer app and for a while, we were right. For a brief moment in the late 1990s, an absurd amount of the gay internet ran through a rack of servers operated by DataLounge and a very small group of stubborn people in NYC.

Over three decades you've been funny, cruel, insightful, ridiculous, compassionate, unhinged, generous, vicious, and occasionally correct. You built a community no investor would have funded, no focus group would have approved, and no modern social media company would have tolerated for five minutes, which is almost certainly why it lasted.

Like Cher and Liza, we somehow lingered. Survival, however, is not the same thing as thriving. Just ask Twitter.

The ultimate irony is that the very search engines which helped grow the DataLounge by connecting millions of very mean people to our vast trove of inane blather have abandoned the web. Having once brought us a steady stream of new users with a penchant for pointless bitchery, they now cut out the middleman, harvest our content along with everything else ever written, keep the audience for themselves, and serve up an AI-generated séance with the corpse of the World Wide Web. We still can't believe Google left us for that slutty little AI twink but there it is. Typical.

At least we can take some solace in the knowledge that we've forever tainted Elon's nascent orbiting data-center brain with voluminous posts documenting Helen Lawson's many apocryphal out-of-town flops. AI, at least, will remember us.

So there it is. Thirty-one years. Enfin.

In the end, I hope DataLounge lived up to the legend of being the internet's longest-running "vile pit of trollery." Thanks for the memories (those memories that are not already swaddled in the fuzzy blanket of my impending senility, that is). Personally, I'll be drowning what recollections are left to me in a delightfully bitter Sazerac before blissfully passing out. Hopefully, I'll wake up next to Suzanne Pleshette, refreshed, albeit somewhat bewildered, only to discover all of this nonsense was actually a thirty-one-year fever dream.

Last one out, turn off the fucking servers.

— Muriel (Retired or perhaps fired, who can say?)

Document: Done. Begone before someone drops a house on you.